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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran Oil For Food Bush
Presidency - Plame and Miers
PARIS - Friday, October 28, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran
Oil For Food
Bush Presidency - Plame and Miers

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Prime Minister Villepin's plans to "clean up" the public sector and implement reforms to make the public sector more in tune with the private sector is one of today's lead stories. For Liberation, which headlines: "Villepin Tightens the Screws," the problem stems from Villepin's own Presidential aspirations: "The tragedy with Villepin is not that he lacks grand projects, it is that his grandest one, running for the presidency, is obscuring all the rest. He may one day 'Be' the State, but in the meantime the State can wait." Financial La Tribune devotes its lead to Villepin's other project, continuing state ownership of certain companies, which he considers "strategic," such as Areva, because of its nuclear activities. In his editorial Pascal Aubert reminds us that "France's nuclear heritage has granted it its status and a seat at the UNSC. In French public opinion, the nuclear sector carries an element of national sovereignty."

Le Figaro devotes its lead to the "The Islamic Threat" in France and the fact that two ground to air missiles brought into Europe in 2002 from Chechnya are still missing. The article contends that these missiles might be in France in the hands of terrorists planning to use them against commercial aircraft.

The Volker report on the Oil for Food scandal published yesterday makes Le Figaro's front page: "The Report That Accuses France." Inside, Isabelle Lasserre explains the relationship which linked France to Iraq immediately before and after the first Gulf war. (See Part C)

Several editorials and op-eds are devoted to Iranian President Ahmadinejad's "Hatred" and his "irresponsible" calls against Israel. (See Part C)

The decision by Harriet Miers to withdraw her candidacy for Supreme Court Justice is widely reported. The articles point to the "difficulties which are accumulating" for President Bush: the Miers withdrawal, but also the alleged involvement of Karl Rove in the Plame affair. (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iran

"Hatred"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its editorial (10/28): "The parenthesis of the Khatami era is over. The hate speech by Iran's Ahmadinejad took place with the nuclear crisis as background. The brutality of the Iranian turnaround is more than just a bad sign. It is a warning. No one believes any longer the make believe story that Iran is just trying to develop its commercial nuclear capabilities. The international community has every right to be very concerned about the possible use that Iran might make of a nuclear bomb."

"Iranian Threats"

Dominique Quinio in Catholic La Croix (10/28): "Words can be deadly. The hatred expressed by the Iranian President is insufferable for the Israelis. It leads them to see in each of their Muslim neighbors a potential threat. Especially if that neighbor has the atomic bomb! It makes the position of the peace proponents in Israel even more delicate. Ahmadinejad's remarks are irresponsible because they feed the hatred of all extremists in the Middle East who believe they are invested with a mission. This verbal violence also makes Mahmoud Abbas's job even more difficult. And last but not least his stance is not good news for the Iranians themselves who are the first victims of such radicalization. International diplomacy has raised its voice against the Iranian President's

remarks: they are a direct threat to Israel and its American protector; but beyond that they are a threat to the region and a provocation for the UN."

"When Iran's President Harms Iran"

Pascal Boniface in right-of-center Le Figaro (10/28): "With his remarks, Ahmadinejad has gone beyond what is acceptable. He has done a disservice to the Palestinian cause which he claims to be defending, compromised his own country's interests and thrown more oil on the raging fires of a strategic region. His remarks of hatred and radicalism go against the spirit of the UN Charter. In taking this line he is doing a favor to Israel's hawks. Ahmadinejad is probably looking to strengthen his position within his own country and hopes to please the Muslim masses of the Middle East who are exasperated with America's policies, the war in Iraq and the non-resolution of the Palestinian issue. But while his domestic position may be strengthened, he will be weakened on the international scene. His remarks are the worst possible confirmation of the international community's fears regarding Iran's nuclear intentions: the expression 'wiping off the map' is very close to 'a nuclear attack.' It is clear that Ahmadinejad and his views fit into the perspective of a shock between civilizations and break away from his predecessor's rhetoric of dialogue."

Oil For Food

"France's Dangerous Liaisons With Saddam's Iraq"

Isabelle Laserre in right-of-center Le Figaro (10/28): "If France retained such a choice position in Iraq, it was because it kept alive the relationship it had developed before the Gulf war, at a time when French companies were doing good business with Baghdad. It was also because at the time American and British companies were not welcome in Iraq and the Iraqis did not trust the Russians. It was also because France, which has a prominent role at the UNSC, had campaigned actively in favor of the 'Oil for Food' program for humanitarian reasons."

Bush Presidency - Plame and Miers

"Bush's Candidate Ousted"

Pascal Riche in left-of-center Liberation (10/28): "For President Bush, this new incident is a new sign of weakness. Stuck in the sands of Iraq, mired in budgetary difficulties, the White House is also threatened with an explosive scandal in the Plame affair. With Miers's withdrawal, President Bush may be tempted to choose a more consensual candidate who would have the support of part of the Democrats. But he would be triggering the ire of the extreme right whose support at this particular time is crucial. He would also be setting off a 'civil war' within his own party. The prospect of a filibuster is profiled on the horizon."

"Bush Could Loose His Head Honcho"

Rebecca Martin in right-of-center France Soir (10/28): "The Karl Rove affair is weakening a President who is already submerged by problems. A political earthquake could hit the White House today as everyone awaits the results of the investigation on the Plame affair. Whether or not official indictments are made, such a scandal must necessarily lead the President to clean house. The list of possible indictments for lying, abuse of power, and obstruction of justice is going to stick the American President into even deeper trouble, after yesterday's other bad news about the Miers's withdrawal."

HOFMANN